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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000493

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#) [AA](#)  
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MAKOVSKY HEARS PRAISE FOR ERDOGAN FROM  
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

REF: A. ISTANBUL 381  
[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 238

Classified By: Classified by Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reason  
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. On 3 September a House Foreign Relations  
Committee Staff delegation led by Alan Makovsky discussed the  
situation of the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate with  
Father Dositheos, Press Relations Chair for the Patriarchate.  
While the situation of Halki Seminary has not improved,  
Dositheos praised Erdogan for the democratic balance he  
provides in a potentially "dangerous" situation. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Father Dositheos described the Greek Orthodox  
community in Turkey as one in which 60 percent of its 3000  
members are over the age of 50. In explaining the Turkish  
Foundations Law (Ref A) to Makovsky, Father Dositheos said  
the Greek Orthodox community currently has 48 foundations  
(administrative boards that manage churches and Greek  
Orthodox property in Turkey), and the GOT "occupies" 20 of  
the 48. An "occupied" foundation is one in which the GOT has  
removed the majority of the elected board members and  
replaced them with the GOT's own selection.

[1](#)3. (U) Contrary to recent reports in the domestic press,  
according to Father Dositheos the Turkish government  
continues to block the active participation of non-Turkish  
metropolitans in the Holy Synod assemblies. In 2004 the GOT  
permitted two non-Turkish metropolitans to observe - but not  
to vote in - the assembly. Fourteen of the Ecumenical  
Patriarchate's 62 metropolitans throughout the world are  
Turkish.

HALKI SEMINARY: STATIC SITUATION  
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[1](#)4. (C) Makovsky suggested the GOT may be refusing to act on  
Halki until Greece permits the Muslim minority in Western  
Thrace to elect their own muftis. Father Dositheos replied  
that muftis are considered public servants, paid by the GOG,  
and therefore should not be elected. He added that muftis in  
Turkey are also not elected by their congregation but instead  
appointed by the Prime Minister. Even though not critical of  
Prime Minister Erdogan, Father Dositheos stressed that he  
does "not believe in the honesty of the Turkish government,"  
noting that when Chancellor Merkel visited from Germany,  
Father Dositheos acted as the interpreter for her meeting  
with the Ecumenical Patriarch. She explained to the  
Patriarch that Erdogan had told her "the Greeks wish to open  
a school in Turkey but we (the Turks) cannot even open a  
mosque in Greece." She reported that when asked if he would  
reopen Halki should a mosque be built in Greece, he responded  
saying "the two things are different."

15. (U) The Patriarchate refused the GOT "offer" to take over the seminary in 1971, as "Halki would have continued as the Turks wished and it would not have produced priests," according to Father Dositheos. For this reason, when pressed to elaborate, he explained the Patriarchate closed the seminary. Ideally, he said, Halki would run as it did prior to 1964, when foreign students were allowed to attend religious institutions in Turkey. At that time, 70 percent of the Halki seminarians were foreign and it operated as a foundation with a Turkish Muslim assistant director.

POSITIVE IMPRESSION OF ERDOGAN  
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16. (C) Despite his distrust of the GOT, Father Dositheos praised Prime Minister Erdogan as a valuable democratic leader - one the U.S. should do its best to support. He noted that Erdogan has brought some freedom to religious dialogue during his tenure in office (ref B). Before Erdogan, he says, those who work at the Patriarchate could not speak openly about their concerns without fear of persecution. Father Dositheos views Erdogan simply as a balanced representative of those who want to embrace a more traditional Turkish system of administration and be free of the old chains of Kemalism. Toward this goal, Erdogan is proceeding cautiously to avoid backlash from the Kemalists. Without Erdogan, he contends, Turkey would become instable and ultra nationalistic.

17. (U) Comment: Father Dositheos did not stray from the

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Patriarchate's well-worn path regarding Halki Seminary. His comments in support of PM Erdogan's limited moves to expand rights for religious minorities also track with previous Patriarchate comments. However, these improvements are unlikely to be sufficient to stem the decline of the Greek Orthodox minority community in Turkey. End Comment.

18. Staff delegation Makovsky did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

WIENER